

House Bill 193
February 10, 2003
House Education Committee
Superintendent Linda McCulloch's Remarks

For the record, I am Linda McCulloch, Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Thank you to Representative Branae for sponsoring HB 193, which is requested by the Office of Public Instruction. This bill represents the consensus of many educational partners committed to ensuring quality K-12 public education in Montana.

In my testimony to this committee last Friday, I explained that the school funding proposals that I requested this legislative session address the variety of challenges in which schools are facing.

House Bill 193 establishes a per-educator entitlement to focus on recruiting and retaining high quality teaching staff in Montana.

The bill allocates a payment of \$1,000 per certified FTE for teachers and other professionals to school districts, special education cooperatives, the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, and schools run by the Department of Corrections.

I spoke to you last week about how schools with declining enrollment have been forced to cut teaching positions because of budget limits. So, you might be wondering why we have a teacher shortage.

Let me explain to you the challenge before us:

Each year Montana needs about 900 new educators, to replace those who retire, take positions in other states, or leave education. The good news is that our eight teacher education programs in Montana -- five Montana university system programs and three private colleges -- graduated about 1045 students in FY 2002. Now, the bad news, only 29% of the graduates or 300 teachers stayed to teach in our schools. There are simply not enough teacher graduates to meet the needs of Montana schools.

Montana K-12 schools are not able to compete with the enticing salaries and employment bonuses that other states are able to offer our graduates. Some states even help new teachers with buying a home, thus beginning a long-term relationship with a school and community outside of Montana.

Our Montana kids need and deserve high quality teachers. House Bill 193 provides additional revenue to help schools maintain quality education. Each school district in Montana is acutely aware of their unique challenges to find and keep high quality teachers in their community.

I want to emphasize to you that the per-educator entitlement is not paid directly to the teacher. Rather, it is a new component of a school district's general fund budget. Under HB 193, a school district receives a per-educator entitlement of \$1,000 for each certified FTE and licensed professional. Certified FTE include teachers, specialists and administrators. Licensed professionals include nurses, physical therapists, speech language professionals, counselors, occupational therapists, and nutritionists. The per-educator entitlement is rooted in local control and so is deposited in the school district general fund to use to address that school district's specific priority recruitment and retention needs.

Each school year, districts report their personnel and teaching assignments to OPI through the Annual Data Collection. For the FY2003 school year, school districts, special education cooperatives, the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, and the Pine Hills and Riverside Youth Correctional Facilities reported a total of 12,595.5 FTE. The cost of the \$1,000 per-educator is estimated to be \$12,595,500 in FY2005. As the fiscal note indicates, we have estimated an increase in teacher retirement benefits as a result of this legislation. Thus, the increase in the state Guaranteed Tax Base Aid (GTB) cost has been estimated at \$437,000.

We cannot ignore the fact that Montana educators are aging, moving out of the state, and leaving the profession. Without qualified teachers to replace them, the high quality education offered by Montana schools is in jeopardy.

Educating our children is the best investment we can make in Montana. Please give our schools the tools that our educators need to engage our students in learning, to prepare the workforce of tomorrow, and to continue our proud Montana tradition of quality education.

Thank you for your time and interest in public education and Montana's 150,000 school kids.

Source: Who Will Teach Montana's Children?
<http://www.opi.state.mt.us/Cert/Index.html>